

A Genealogy of the Benjamin Family
of Peoria County, Illinois

Compiled by

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I. England to America, 1632

The ship Lion^{1,2*} (or Lyon³) of Bristol, commanded by Capt. Pierce, sailed from England June 24, 1632⁴ carrying 123 passengers to New England. After a voyage of twelve weeks (eight weeks from Land's End, the southwestern tip of England) Cape Ann was sighted and the Lion docked at Boston September 16, 1632. This was only two years after Boston was first settled.

Among those disembarking that day were the first Benjamins to set foot in the New World: the brothers John, Richard, and perhaps Caleb.¹ In addition there were their sisters Miss Abigail and Mrs. Priscilla (Benjamin) Tutsen; John's wife, Abigail; and John's four eldest children John, Abigail, Samuel, and Mary.

The Benjamins probably came from Heathfield Parish, Sussex, about 40 miles southeast of London.³ One source² indicates that they might have come from Herefordshire, which is 20 miles north of London. However, the Sussex location is considered more likely since John's wife, the former Abigail Eddy, was from Cranbrook¹, which is in the adjoining county of Kent only about 15 miles from Heathfield. In those days people usually married close to home.

The occupations of the Benjamins are not known. John probably was born in 1598 and died June 14, 1645.¹ His wife was born in 1601 and died May 20, 1687. Richard was younger than John; he was born some time after 1600, and died in the 1680's.

II. Ancestors and Indians, 1740-1835

The scene now shifts some 100 years in time and 150 miles in distance to some place in New York state in about 1740. This gap is large in terms of years and also in terms of historical knowledge of the Benjamin family. No evidence has yet been found to indicate that the family of Benjamins of interest in New York at this time were direct descendants of the John or Richard who arrived at the new town of Boston in 1632. Some of the descendants of these two brothers have been traced, but these do not include the particular branch of the family with which we are here concerned. This neither proves nor disproves anything concerning the ancestry of these New York Benjamins. They may be directly related to the Boston arrivals, or they may be descended from some other Benjamin who arrived in America at a later date. At any rate, in October 1738 in New York was born Jonathan Benjamin⁵. His brother, David Sr., was also born during this period, but whether before or after Jonathan

* Numbers refer to References

is not known.

Although the line of descent which we are tracing is from David and not Jonathan, the story of Jonathan is of such interest that it should be told in some detail.

Although born at a time when the average life expectancy was about thirty years, Jonathan lived to the incredible age of almost 103 years! His wife, Margaret, reached the age of 95; they were married nearly 80 years. Their longevity was certainly not due to living lives of ease. On the contrary, their lives were ones of hardship.

Perhaps the best way to describe their lives is to quote directly from a person who knew them. The following⁶ was written by Mr. Samuel Park of Marshall, Illinois (formerly of Union Township, Licking County, Ohio) in 1870.

"Jonathan Benjamin, the father of Mrs. Ford, Mrs. Jones, and Bennoni Benjamin, moved on Auter Creek with his family in the Spring of 1802, and settled on a fifty acre donation lot joining that of his son-in-law, Ford. This lot was first occupied by John Horned. There were several families of the Benjamins moved from the Susquehanna in Pennsylvania in 1795, and settled at or near Marietta, but Jonathan was not one of them, but came there with his son-in-law Ford in 1798. We cannot learn with certainty where he went from the Susquehanna, but think that when David and his brothers moved to Marietta, that Jonathan moved to Maryland, thence to Wheeling, Va., and to Marietta, in 1798. Jonathan Benjamin was in some respects an extraordinary man. He was a person of rather coarse features, but of strong muscular powers, with a still stronger will. He was very determined in all of his undertakings, and of rather an unforgiving temperament. Having passed through the French and Indian wars, and through the war of the Revolution, and having suffered much and long by Indian depredations, both in the loss of friends and property, the finer feelings of his nature had become blunted to such an extent that he seemed to have lost most of his sympathy for his fellow man. Still he was a man of religious habits, and of good morals, but was generally considered to be a man that was naturally morose and unsociable, and I believe was not known through life to have expressed his forgiveness of the Indian race. He was not a reading man, hence what time he gave to social intercourse with his neighbors, was given to the relation of personal experience, or to business matters. He was a military soldier or a frontiersman, most of his life. It was not until he was about eighty years old that he consented to settle himself for the balance of

his life. He bought in the woods and cleared up his last farm after he was seventy-eight years old. Notwithstanding this life of hardships, the iron constitution of himself and his excellent wife sustained them to a great age. Mrs. Benjamin possessed social qualities that in a great measure compensated for the lack of them in her husband. They lived together as man and wife for nearly eighty years, and raised a family of seven daughters and one son, all of whom lived to raise families of their own, and most of them large families. One of their daughters, (Mrs. Black), is still living. As before stated, we have found it difficult to trace this family through all their meanderings; but Jonathan Benjamin was born in the year 1738, we think in the State of New York, but we can find nothing definite on that point. There is a family tradition that he was born, raised and married in New York, then moved to Pennsylvania and settled on the Susquehanna river, and from thence into Maryland, and from Maryland to Wheeling, Va., thence to Marietta, in 1798, and to Licking in 1802. Their appearance and dialect was that of the Knickerbocker class of New York in former years, and my recollection is that they moved from either New York or New Jersey to Pennsylvania soon after their marriage. There is no doubt among his friends but what he entered the military service at the age of fourteen years, and served through the war, but they cannot tell what war. It must have been some Indian campaign, as the French war did not commence for some two years later. He also served in the war of the Revolution, for which he drew a pension until his death; and some of his grandchildren still have some continental money which they claim was paid him for wages while in the army. We find him and his brother David with other men and their families, in a fort on the Susquehanna in 1775, where he escaped from the Indians, by being on the other side of the river with his family when the fort was taken, and his brother and family carried into captivity, and they saved only their lives and the clothes on their backs. From this we have no certain history of his migrations until we find him and his three sons-in-law at Marietta in 1798, and another son-in-law living at Wheeling, where he had probably stopped for one or two years before moving to Marietta. In the year of 1802 he settled on a fifty acre lot of land that corners within a few rods of where Union Station now is. Here he remained until 1816, when he sold his land to James Holmes, Jr., and bought again one mile further west, which he continued to own till his death at the age of one hundred and three years. I had a conversation with him but a short time before his death, at which he recapitulated his Indian history and sufferings. I think they were driven from their homes and their property burned three times,

But the places where they suffered I have forgotten."

A few additional bits of information from other sources may be added concerning the remarkable Jonathan. As mentioned above, he was on the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania in 1775. His daughter Mary was born there, in York County, in 1777. Sometime later he moved his family to the vicinity of Baltimore, Maryland for protection against the Indians who became troublesome while many of the men were with the Continental army in the Revolutionary War.⁷ Jonathan himself served in the army as a private under Captains Newman and Hepburn in Colonel Long's Pennsylvania Regiment.⁵

After the war he returned with his family to Pennsylvania. At the time of the first national census in 1790 his household in Northumberland County, Pennsylvania (about 40 miles north of Harrisburg) was recorded as containing two "free white males 16 or over" and six "free white females, any age".⁸ In the spring of 1793 he moved to the Virginia side of the Ohio River, nearly opposite Marietta, Ohio.⁷

Among his eight children were:⁶

Benoni, born April 11, 1772, died 1830 July 17 1837
Mary (Ford), born March 22, 1777, married Phineas Ford April 5, 1798 in Washington Co., Ohio
Jane (Ingraham), married Isaac "Ingman" (misspelling of Ingraham) March 8, 1810 in Licking Co., Ohio
Jemima (Black), born about 1786
Lilly (Jones), died October 22, 1802, Licking Co., Ohio

Jonathan's wife, Margaret, died January 17, 1837, at the age of 94. Jonathan himself died August 26, 1841, aged 102 years, 10 months. Both they and their son Benoni were buried in the Old Burying Ground, Granville, Licking County, Ohio."

Let us return now to David Sr., brother of Jonathan and direct ancestor of the Benjamin branch being traced here. Little is known of the early part of his life except that he was born in New York presumably some time before about 1745, since his second eldest child was born in 1767. This child, born in Pennsylvania, was David Jr., of whom more will be heard later.

David Sr., his wife Elizabeth, and their six children were living near the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania in 1775. The following is again quoted directly from Mr. Parks,⁶

who gave us the earlier story of Jonathan.

"At this time the Indians were still quite restless and sought every opportunity to commit depredations upon frontiersmen. At the commencement of the Revolution they had become so troublesome in that part of the country that several of the Benjamin families and a few others, for mutual protection, had erected a block-house, and a small fort, where they had kept their families for some time, they knowing that a band of Indians were lurking around them, but while thus combined and protected the Indians did not dare to attack them, and the whites supposed that they had given the matter up and left. In this vain confidence, one pleasant Sunday morning, in the month of May, 1775, they sallied out to their respective cabins, to look at their gardens, etc. While thus divided, the Indians, who had been lying in ambush waiting for such an opportunity, rushed upon them and made prisoners of David Benjamin and his family, including his wife and six children, with some others. In this mele Jonathan Benjamin and his family escaped with their lives by being on the opposite side of the river. David Benjamin, feeling provoked at the thought of being taken prisoner before he was disarmed, raised his rifle and shot an Indian, who fell off the fence and was supposed to be killed, for which, in a few minutes after, he was killed by an Indian with his tomahawk, at a moment when he was not suspecting any danger. This the chief expressed sorrow for when he found that his brother was not killed but only had an arm broken."

No other information is known concerning David Sr., who passed from a now unknown birthplace in New York to an unmarked grave in the wilds of the Pennsylvania frontier of 1775. Let us return to the story⁶ of eight-year-old David Jr. and his family after their capture by the Indians (probably Iroquois).

"Our hero--David Benjamin, Jr.--was the second eldest of this family of children taken prisoners, and who, with their mother, were hurried away into a hopeless captivity, as soon as their houses were pillaged and burned. They were probably taken into Western New York, as David's children say their grandmother often told them that they were close to the Canada line, but not in Canada. This family remained prisoners for seven years, until the close of the war. One or two of the children having become so accustomed to Indian life, and having nearly lost their knowledge of the English language, refused to return to civilized life; among whom was David's only sister, who after she had married

among the Indians and had two children, was recaptured by the whites near Niagara Falls, but was so much dissatisfied with civilized life that she returned to the Indians, and was never again heard of by her friends. Among those who did return, were David and two brothers, and their mother, who lived to a great age, and died in Hocking county, Ohio. After their return, they remained on the Susquehanna until David married, in the year 1795, when he, with his mother, and one or more brothers, moved to the Northwest Territory, near the mouth of the Muskingum river, here they remained about four years, when they moved about twenty miles from Marietta, probably in the northeast corner of Athens county. There they remained till May, 1805 or 1806, when they settled on the farm where Union Station now stands, and where David died, on the 17th day of July, aged sixty-seven years, and where his wife died in 1835, supposed to be sixty-eight years old. David Benjamin was a frontiersman all his life, and so much of his youth having been spent among savages, he grew up without education, or much knowledge of the refinements of fashionable society, but he was a peaceable and a kindhearted citizen. He was cheerful, quite sociable, and very industrious. Although he often said he never could forgive the Indian race for the wrongs that he had suffered, still when a friendly Indian called at his door for bread, he never would turn him away till he supplied his wants. But when this was done, he would at once request him to leave. He seemed to fear that the remembrance of his wrongs would overcome his feelings of humanity, hence he would not suffer them to remain where they would be likely to tempt him, or excite his feelings of revenge. For some cause he entirely laid aside the use of a gun, and for many years kept none of his own. He raised a family of three sons and four daughters, five of whom are still living (in 1870--Ed.), the eldest seventy-four and the youngest sixty-five years of age. William, the second, and Sally, the seventh, are both dead, but both left large families."

It may be recalled that in the records of the Census of 1790 Jonathan Benjamin was tallied in Northumberland County, Pennsylvania. In the same county at that time also was listed⁸ a "Widow Benjamin", whose household consisted of three males over sixteen years of age, two males under sixteen, and one female. In all probability this was Elizabeth, the widow of David Sr. The three older males correspond to David Jr. (then 23 and unmarried) and his two brothers, which agrees with the account above. There is no explanation of the two younger boys.

Forty years later, in the Census of 1830,¹⁰ Jonathan and his nephew David were recorded in Union Township, Licking County, Ohio. In close proximity in the same township were

listed John A. Benjamin and Christian Benjamin, both young married men in their twenties. Christian at that time had two sons less than five years old.

In the story quoted above it was stated that David had three sons, one of whom was named William. John and Christian apparently were the other two sons. While this has not definitely been proved, the following arguments support this belief:

1. They were living adjacent to each other and close to David and old Jonathan. Therefore they probably were close relatives.

2. Jonathan had only one son, Benoni, who lived in adjacent Fairfield County. It is improbable that John and Christian were Benoni's sons. It will be shown below that Christian was born in 1803 or 1804 in Washington County, Ohio (near Marietta) while Benoni already had settled in Licking County in 1801⁷. David, however, was still living near Marietta in 1804.

3. John and Christian are of appropriate ages to be David's children, the first six of whom were born between 1795 and about 1805 as indicated above.

4. One of Christian's sons (see below) was named David and a daughter was named Elizabeth (David's wife's name).

David died July 17, 1834, and his wife Elizabeth died March 10, 1835.⁹ They were buried in the Old Burying Ground, Granville, Ohio, as were old Jonathan, his wife Margaret, and their son Benoni.

III. Ohio and Illinois, 1850-1880

In Licking County, Ohio in 1850¹¹ we again find the Benjamin brothers, John and Christian, living as neighbors. By this time, however, they had moved from Union to Burlington Township. In addition, they appeared no longer as "John A." and "Christian" but were listed as "Jonathan" and "Christopher". One might speculate that "John" had been used earlier to avoid confusion during the lifetime of old Jonathan. The reason for the change from "Christian" to "Christopher" is less evident, but it must be remembered that variations in spelling of names were not uncommon in those days when not everyone could read and write.

The ages of Jonathan (51) and Christopher (47) in 1850

agree with those of John and Christian in 1830. In addition, John in 1830 had a son between 5 and 10 years old. This son appears in the 1850 census, between the listings for Jonathan and Christopher, as "Salv----" (latter portion of name illegible), age 29, with his own family. Christopher in 1830 had two sons less than 5 years old. By 1850 the eldest, William, age 23, had married and was living in nearby Bennington Township, while Jobe, age 21, was still at home. Therefore there can be no doubt that the "Jonathan" and "Christopher" of 1850 were the "John" and "Christian" of 1830.

In the census listings prior to 1850, first names were given only for the heads of families. Beginning in 1850, however, first names and ages were listed for all family members. The listing for Christopher's family was as follows on October 7, 1850:

Christopher Benjamin	47
Jane	44
Jobe A.	21
Elizabeth A.	19
Margaret L.	14
David M.	12
Wilson S.	9
Isaac K.	7
Abram (Abraham?)	4

It was indicated that all of the family had been born in Ohio except Jane, who was born in Virginia. Christopher was a farmer and owned \$2500 worth of property (it is not clear if this was real or personal property). All of the children except Jobe and Abraham were attending school.

In addition, Christopher's eldest son, also a farmer, was listed separately with his family:

William Benjamin	23
Elizabeth	20
Caster (Casper?)	4/12

Christopher and his entire family (as far as is known) left Ohio in 1852 and moved overland by team to Peoria County, Illinois¹². He purchased a farm there (traditionally in the area of Millbrook Township known as "Scotland Prairie", east of Laura and north of Brimfield), and farmed until retiring from active labor.

Christopher and his wife, Jane, are buried in the "Old Campbell Cemetery", now abandoned, about a quarter mile north of Route 90 a few miles northeast of Laura, Illinois.

The inscriptions on their tombstones read as follows:

"Christopher Benjamin
Born in Washington County, Ohio March 21, 1804
Died Dec 16, 1881 Aged 77 ys, 8 ms, 26 ds"

"Jane W.,
wife of Christopher Benjamin,
died Oct 10, 1856"

My first visit to this cemetery with my father some twenty years ago created the interest which has led to this study of the Benjamin family history. On our most recent visit there, in 1957, we were dismayed to find that the stones had been toppled and seriously damaged by vandals.

The year given for Christopher's birth, 1804, does not agree with the 1850 census record which indicates he was born in 1803, as does an old county atlas¹². The latter source also states the year of his death as 1880, and names his wife as "formerly Mary Ingraham", a native of Ohio. It may be possible that he was married twice.

We have knowledge of the descendants of only two of Christopher's eight children. The eldest, William J., eventually settled near Paxton, Illinois. He had seven children, who are listed below together with their children¹².

1. Casper C. 1850-1896

" Alice (Heffington) 1871-1937
" Lillie M. 1872-1893
" Lon L. 1874-
" Floyd Died in infancy
" Carroll Died in infancy
" Fern 1884-
" Fanne (Swartley) 1886-1947
" Zoe 1888-
" Dollie (Tobin) 1890-
" Franke (Morgan) 1893-

2. George W.

Arthur Ray 1877-
Rinnie (Fox) 1882-
Walter L. 1890-

3. Mollie (Rockwell)

Myrtle (Ward)
Minnie (Hughson)
Marie
Miriam (Jackson)

4. Lida (Kinsman)

Leil
Ivaloo
Marguerite (Coulter)
Virgil
" Georgena (Waterhouse)
Glenn

5. John J.

Gertrude
Clyde
Minnie (Way)

6. William W.

Lucille (Watt)

7. Edward

Another of Christopher's sons, Wilson S., was 11 years old when his family moved from Ohio to Illinois. There he grew to manhood and married Lydia Ann Curtis (born May 2, 1843) on August 31, 1862¹³. To this union was born one son, William Jonathan, on September 12, 1863.

Wilson served in the Union army during the Civil War. Upon his return, according to family tradition, he decided to move on West. His wife refused to accompany him, due perhaps to parental objections, whereupon Wilson abandoned his wife and young son and eventually settled in Guthrie, Oklahoma. There he adopted the name of Benjamin Wilson, married, and reared a family under this name while following the trade of a stonecutter. Wilson died May 22, 1919¹³.

A branch of the Benjamin family seems also to have been established in Missouri. This may have resulted from an intermediate stop by Wilson (still using the surname "Benjamin") before settling in Oklahoma. There also is a possibility that Christopher's son Isaac may have moved on to Missouri.

IV. Illinois and Iowa, 1880-1965

Wilson's son, William J., grew up around Rochester (now known as Elmore) Illinois. He married Viola V. Winchester (born April 14, 1867) on April 20, 1885. To them were born six sons:

Ray Vaughn	1886-1968
Harley Wilson	1891-1968
Donald David	1893-
Leo Vern	1896-1948
Clair Dewey	1898-1969
Claud Theodore	1900-1901

William was engaged in farm work near Elmore until 1892. At that time he moved his family to Galesburg, Illinois, where he was employed in the "Old South" and the "Galesburg" brickyards until 1901, when he returned to farming near Elmore. In 1916 the family, with the exception of the two eldest sons, Ray and Harley, moved to Iowa City, Iowa. Here they engaged in dairying, living on a farm which is now occupied by the Iowa City Airport. William's wife, Viola, died in 1927. William later returned to Williamsfield, Illinois where he died in 1938. The couple are buried in Oak Lawn Cemetery, Iowa City.

William's eldest son, Ray, married Blanche Doubet and engaged in farming and dairying near Williamsfield until retirement. Their daughter, Verla (Mrs. Lincoln Scheeler) was born in 1913, and now resides in Peoria, Illinois.

Harley served in France during World War I in Company K, 111th Infantry, 28th Division, A.E.F. He was married to Beulah I. Doubet in 1920, and farmed near Williamsfield until retirement. They have three sons:

1. Hollis W., (1925), married Dolores Manual. They have two children, Cheri (1955) and Bart (1958). He is an attorney in Peoria, Illinois.
2. Roland J., (1928), married Maxine Cadwell. They have a daughter, Nancy (1954), and live in Morton Grove, Illinois. He is an engineer with Cook Electric Company.
3. Jerald H., (1933), married Jean Self. They have a son, Bret (1965). He is engaged in farming near Williamsfield.

Don was employed as chief clerk in the Rock Island Railroad freight office in Iowa City until his retirement. His wife is the former Emma Schonfelder.

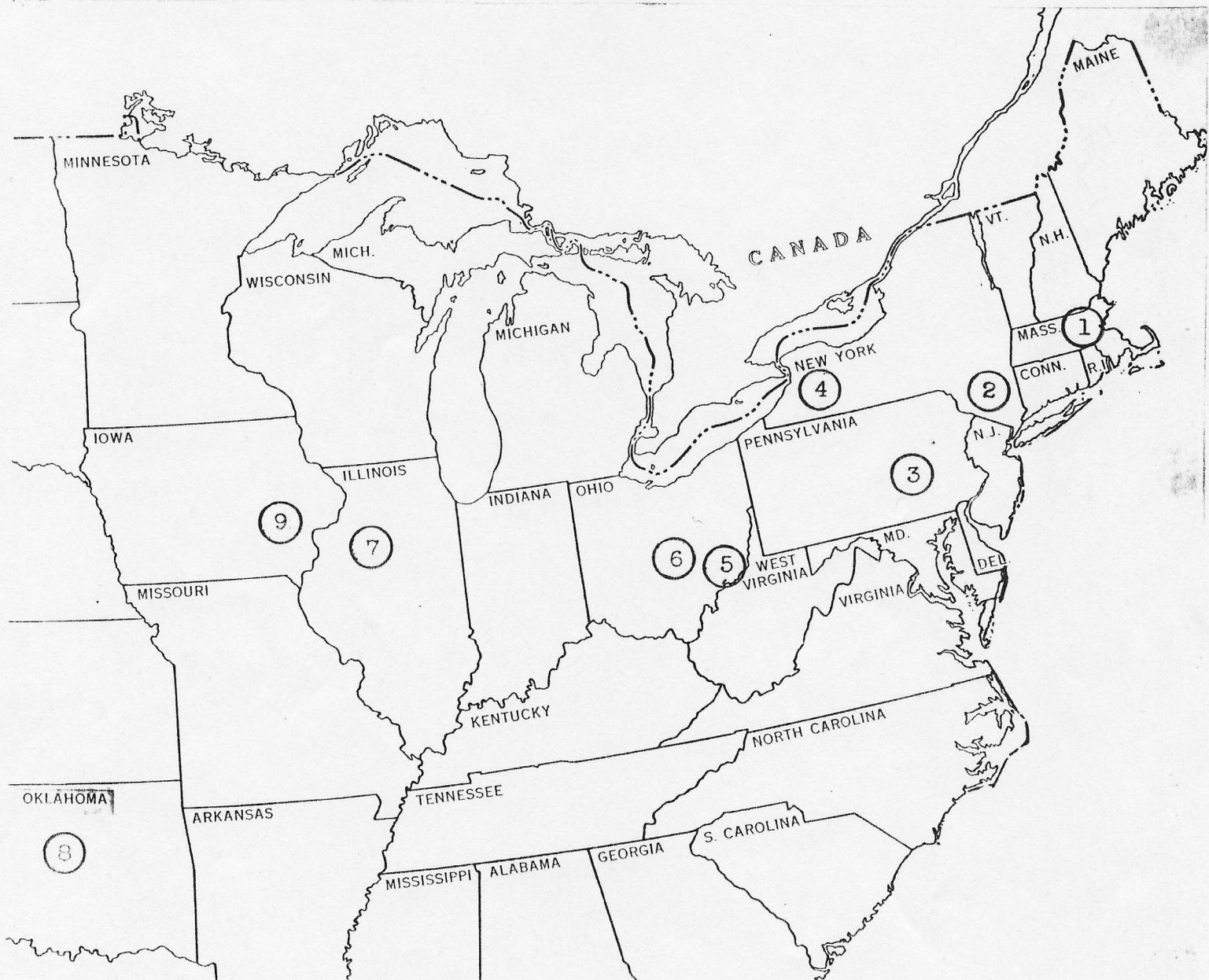
Vern married Edna Nass; their son Paul was born in 1930. For many years Vern operated a Standard Oil service station in Iowa City. He later was active in the real estate business

until his death in 1948. Paul is a teacher in the public school system in Ottumwa, Iowa. His wife is the former Jane Frohn; they have one child, Diane (1964).

Clair married Henrietta Gibson. He was employed as electrician with the University of Iowa at Iowa City until retirement. They now reside at Sarasota, Florida.

The youngest child, Claud, died in infancy of bronchitis. He was buried in Linwood Cemetery in Galesburg, but the location of the grave was not shown on cemetery records and is now unknown.

LOCATIONS OF INTEREST



1. First Benjamins land at Boston, 1632
2. Jonathan and David Sr. born about 1740
3. David Sr. killed by Indians, 1775
4. David Jr. and family captives of Indians, 1775-1782
5. David lives near Marietta, 1795-1806, Christopher born
6. David and family settle in Licking County, 1806
7. Christopher moves to Illinois, 1852
8. Wilson settles in Oklahoma
9. William J. moves to Iowa, 1916

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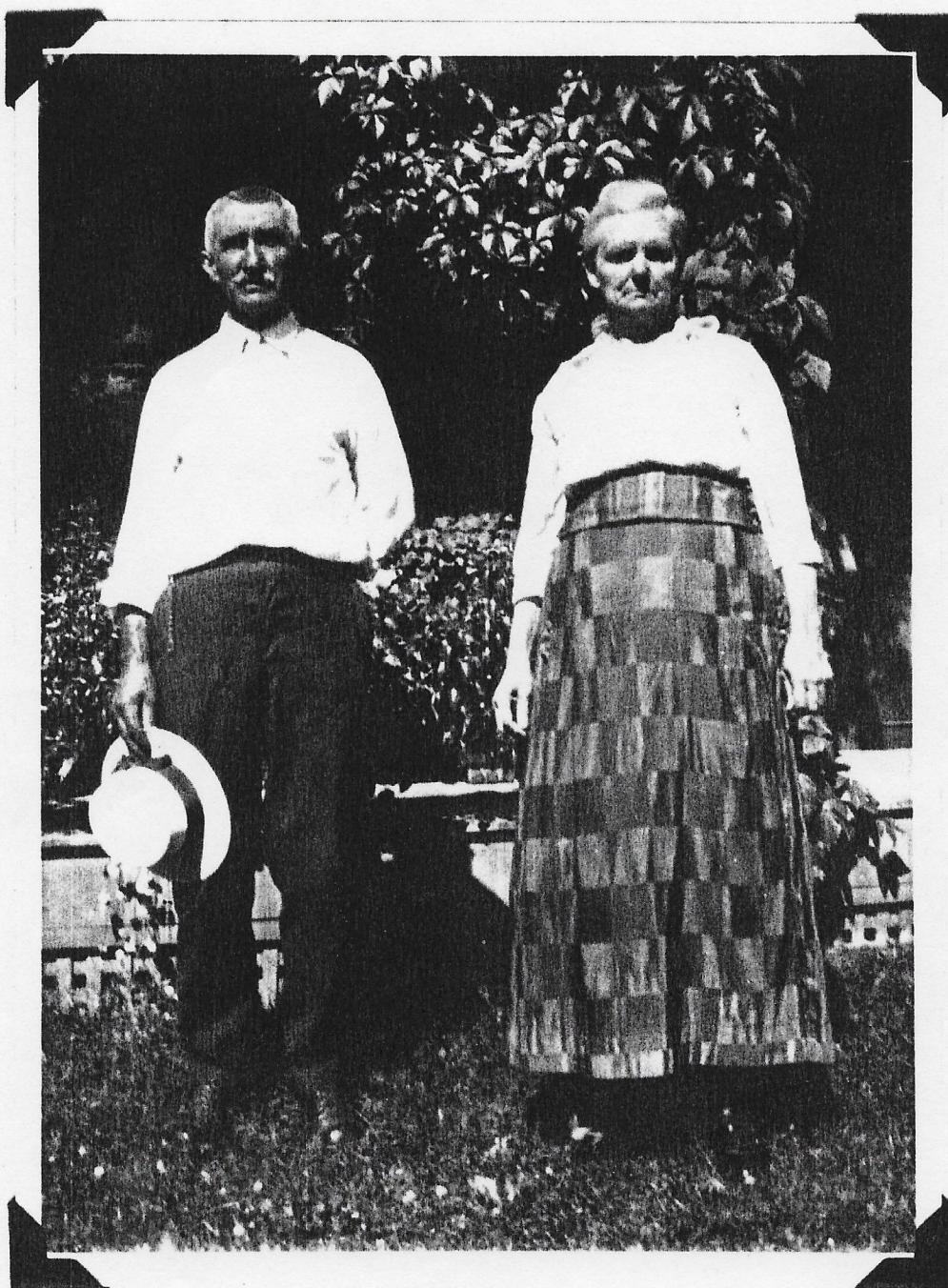
1. Grafton Magazine, 1908-1909, vol. 1, no. 3, p. 46 (A)
2. Benjamin, Mary Louise, "A Genealogy of the Family of Lt. Samuel Benjamin". 1900 (A)
3. Hoover, Merle M., "Genealogy of Park Benjamin". Columbia University Press, New York, 1948 (A)
4. "Original Lists of Persons of Quality Who Went From Great Britain to the American Plantations 1600-1700". John Camden Hotten, London, 1874. Reprinted by Empire State Book Co., New York. (A)
5. Daughters of the American Revolution, Lineage Book, vol. 99, p. 216, 1928. (B)
6. Park, Samuel, "Notes of Early History of Union Township, Licking County, Ohio". pp. 19 and 20 (Jonathan), pp. 22-24 (David), Pioneer Paper #5, Licking County Pioneer Society, 1870. (A)
7. Hill, "History of Licking County, Ohio". (B)
8. U.S. Government, "Census of 1790". Published in book form. (B)
9. "Gravestone Inscriptions in the Old Burying Ground, Granville, Licking Co., Ohio". Old Northwest Genealogical Quarterly, vol. 8, 1905 (B)
10. U.S. Government, "Census of 1830". Microfilm. (B)
11. U.S. Government, "Census of 1850". Microfilm. (B)
12. Private letter from Miss Zoe Benjamin, Rantoul, Illinois, Feb. 19, 1957, quoting from a "county atlas of some sort gotten up around 1886". The atlas reference was to Miss Benjamin's father, Casper C., son of William J. and grandson of Christopher.
13. Benjamin family bible, in possession of Mr. Ray V. Benjamin, Williamsfield, Illinois

Sources: (A) Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
(B) Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois



The William J. Benjamin Family about 1914

Harley, Viola (mother), Mildred (foster daughter),
Clair, William (father), Vern, Wilson (grandfather).
(Ray and Don missing)



William and Viola Benjamin